

REMARKS

This response is intended to place the subject application in condition for allowance. Claims 25 and 51-57 have been cancelled. Therefore, claims 24, 26-32, 34-50 and 58-59 are now pending.

Claims 34-43 have been allowed.

Claims 31 and 58, which were objected to for depending from a rejected claim, have been amended into independent form and are now believed to be allowable.

Claim 47 has also been amended into independent form and is now believed to be allowable. Although claim 47 was included in the list of claims rejected under §102(b) based on Suzuki, this appears to have been a mistake. Claim 47 was not specifically discussed in the §102(b) rejection, and recites subject matter similar to allowable claim 31. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and allow claim 47.

Additionally, independent claims 24, 34, 44 and 59 have been amended to recite end caps having "snap couplings" that are configured for snap fitting to adjacent end caps to substantially interlock and hold adjacent segments together. This subject matter is clearly not taught, suggested or otherwise rendered obvious by the cited references. Although the latest Office action asserts, in connection with the rejection of claim 59, that Fig. 9 of Suzuki discloses a deformable male member configured for "snap fitting" into a female member, the Suzuki reference does not support this conclusion. Figure 9 of Suzuki merely discloses two collars 39b joined by a dovetail joint. Thus, by arranging one collar 39b adjacent to *and above* another collar 39b, the dovetail finger on one collar (shown in Fig. 9) can slide downwardly into the slot 45 on

the other collar 39b to thereby join the two collars together. There is no suggestion that the dovetail finger shown in Fig. 9 is deformed in any way, or that it can function as a snap coupling with the slot 45. In fact, Suzuki's only mention of Fig. 9 is as follows:

As shown in FIG. 8, the collar 39b of a first bobbin 36 may be provided with a pin 41, and the collar 39b of another bobbin 36 to be coupled to the first bobbin may be provided with a hole 43 which can fit the pin 41, so that these two bobbins are coupled. *Furthermore, as shown in FIG. 9, a slot 45 may be adopted for coupling.*

See column 4, lines 47-52 (Emphasis added). Clearly, Suzuki does not teach or suggest bobbins having deformable male members and/or snap couplings.

Similarly, Sato lacks any disclosure or suggestion of end caps having snap couplings to substantially interlock and hold adjacent segments together. On the contrary, Sato merely discloses a tongue and groove arrangement for aligning (not interlocking) adjacent end caps.

For these reasons, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the §102(b) rejections of claims 24, 34, 44 and 59 and the claims depending therefrom.

CONCLUSION

It is believed that all of the stated grounds of rejection have been properly traversed, accommodated, or rendered moot. Applicant therefore respectfully requests that the Examiner reconsider and withdraw all presently outstanding rejections. It is believed that a full and complete response has been made to the outstanding Office Action and the present application is in condition for allowance. Thus, prompt and favorable consideration of this amendment is respectfully requested. If the Examiner

believes that personal communication will expedite prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at (314) 726-7500.

Respectfully submitted,

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